

Against *Presb:*
VNIVERSALL
Libertie of
CONSCIENCE.

B E I N G
ANIMADVERSIONS
UPON
Two *Letters* written to a *Friend*
Pleading for it.

Imprimatur J. A. CRANFORD.



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An Extract of
A Letter.

Animadversions.

I Every day grow
stronger for an V-
niversall liberty of
Conscience.

AN Vniversall liberty of Con-
science, is an universall liber-
ty to Sin, to maintaine He-
resie, to practise Idolatry,
to vent Blasphemy; in a
word, an universall liberty to dishonour
God, under pretence of Serving him, and
to damme ones own soule irrecoverably,
(unlesse every one may be saved by his
own Religion, though never so false) and
to hazard (as much as men can) the
damnation of multitudes of others, who
may be infected by such poysonful Do-
ctrines.

Nor can I altogether agree with
Mr. D. that either in a particu-
lar Congregation, or Synodical
Government of severall Chur-
ches, there neede any, either
bond, as not to part upon occa-
sion; or such carriage of things
by Vote as should become a pres-
sure upon weake Consciences,
with which though weake and
erronious) wee are taught by
Scripture to beare.

No Conscience deserves to be
called weake, but that which
holds the foundation truly,
though weakely, and withall
expresses the power of Con-
science in what ever it holds,
walking according to the Rules
of Piety and Honesty acknow-
ledged. How shall I beleve
that man acts or forbears, pro-
fesses, or denies out of Consci-
ence (though weak) who in un-
deniable matters hath put away
Conscience, or feared it?

And

I

And in truth if it be sadly weighed that the Dictates of the Conscience are not (like those of our Reason or Will) submittible at our owne pleasures to an outward power,

being that part of the inward Man, which God doth particularly claim to himselfe,

it might invite all Christians to vindicate one anothers Consciences from errors by powerful compulsion of Gods Word, but not by outward punishments to compell them to that which is

not

I doe not understand how it is said a man can submit his Reason (any more then his Conscience) to an outward power; I may be silent, but my Reason is not submitted, when I feare an outward power: Also, is not a mans Reason applied to matters of Conscience, the Eye of it, whereby a man judges this or that Doctrine to be truth, whether he be mistaken in it, or no? If then I can submit my Reason can I not, (doe I not) also submit my Conscience;

Nor know I how properly it is said, that the Conscience (contra distinct from the Reason and Will) is that part of the inward man, which God doth peculiarly claime to himselfe: claimes hee not the whole man (inward (as well as outward) the Reason, Memory, Will, Affections) as well as the Conscience? if the Conscience be not rather all these, as relating to Religion; Also, if a mans conscience must be wholly left to the powerfull compulsion of Gods Word, why not a mans Reason or Will also, without offering to either the violence of outward power?

Here it is Obiected, That it is not to be compelled to that which is not in its owne power.

Ans. The word, *compelling*, being mistaken in regard of the end of it, deceives. Or else this Assertion is very dangerous. For, 1. The punishment is not to compell to put away or deny Conscience, but either to study, or receive meanes of Instruction to *satisfie Conscience*; Or to forbear spreading an Error, which would pervert Seules, or breede publick-disturbance. And this Compulsion may (if you list so to distinguish) be sayd to be applicable rather to the Reason or Will, then to the Conscience, unlesse you will suppose the Conscience to be so *per mptory*, as to conclude, that all is but delusion that can be said against it, and so *violent*, as none upon earth

not in their
own power,

but it must
be (by our
owne con-
fession)
though a
truth in it
selfe, yet it
is a sinne in
them.

And though e-
very mans par-
ticular zeale to
his owne fan-
cies, hath al-
most swallowed
those two best of
Christian ver-
tues, and true
badges of Chri-
stianity,

may command them silence. Which kinde of
Conscience I dare be bold to say, the Apostle had
not in his minde, when he gave Rules about *weake*
Consciences. Nor can you describe mee a *perverse*
or willfull Conscience if this be to be counted
weake. 2. If no man may be *punished*, for that which
is not in his owne power, 1: How then, is an ha-
bituated Theife, Drunkard, Swearer, &c. pu-
nished, of whom we confesse, that he cannot leave
it? 2: How doth God justly punish the Repro-
bate, in whose power surely (God not giving
him grace) even *Pelagius* himselfe durst not say,
it was to convert himselfe.

It is againe objected, *Wee confesse, though the thing
be truth in it selfe, yet it is a Sinne in them.*

But is it not a Sinne also to deny Truth, to for-
beare duty, to speake and act against both? The way
then to free the man from Sinne, is to instruct him;
and if he be froward and will not receive Instruction,
then to perswade him by some *punishment*, to be so
humble and wise, as to hearken; yet not force him to
act, or professe, till he be instructed, Only if his opi-
nion or practice, fret like a Gangrene (as the A-
postles phrase is) a Restraint may be, and should be
put upon that man, even the while Instruction is of-
fering.

I acknowledge *Charity* and *Humility* to be
great vertues; But *Faith* must not be forgotten
among Christians, without which a man cannot
be a Christian at all; nor *Zeale*, without which a
man shall be spewed out of Christs mouth, I
would be charitable to a Jew, or Turke, or Arri-
an; But if my *Faith* condemne not their opini-
ons as damnable, I have no true *Faith* in Christ;
And if my *Zeale* can endure their blasphemy a-
gainst Christ, I am not so respective to him as I
would be to the honour of my Prince, or even
of my selfe: Nor yet doe I love their Soules (or
others

*stianity, Cha-
rity and Hu-
mility.*

others whom they will endanger if let alone) so much as I doe a mans Horses or Oxen, which I will neither suffer infectious Cattle to come amongst, nor yet to be stolne without punishment. In matters of doubtfull disputations, *Humility* doth well not to obtrude any opinion too pre-emptorily. But Religion allowes no *Scepticisme* under pretence of *Humility*, in matters of moment. And the best *Charity*, is to secure others *Soules*, and labour to regaine the Erring, by instruction, seconded with all other motives.

Yet Naturall Reason, the Rules of common civilitie, and *Lex Talionis*, might fully teach us to be that to others, which wee could wish others towards us, the Tables being turned; and I dare boldly say, that there is not a Sect now amongst us, that if they may not tyrannize over all the other nine, would not thinke their truth (whatsoever in it self) fit to be tollerated, and how, (but from an insolent over-valuing our owne thoughts) can any of us deny, that priviledge to others, which wee claime from others as just:

As for naturall Reason, common Civility, and *Lex talionis*, the Tables being turned; I say in a word, As it is my duty to suffer for truth, if God call me to it; and my duty to fight for the truth, if God call me to that. So is it no lesse my duty to use the Sword of Justice to vindicate the truth, and Gods honour, and Soules Safety (according to the method afore exprest) if God have intrusted me with that Sword also. And in conclusion, he spake like a wise man, that said, *It is better to live in that Common Wealth, where nothing is lawfull, then where every thing.* Apply this to Religion, and you have my heart fully subscribing it thus. I had rather live among Barbarians, amongst whom nothing of the true Religion is suffered, then any where in the world among all Religions suffered.

An Extract of another Letter before the sending
of the former *Animadversions*.

The Letter.

I Am sorry to see that in matter of Conscience you send me to Authority: my Reason and Will are my owne, though not to consent, yet to be submitted by me to Authority, but the Conscience is Gods peculiar? which to offend though erroneous is a Sinne; and if a sinne in me to doe it, I cannot conceive it lesse in them, that by any kinde or degree of persecution, tempt or force me.

The Bishops, upon a conscientious sight of errors forlooke Romes authority, wee upon the like grounds have outed the Bishops, against whom the reatest objection was that which we now allow not others to make; And

Animadversions,

A Gaine, I would faine be informed how I can submit my Reason, more then my Conscience to Authority. And also how I may submit my will, unlesse in things indifferent, or in Sufferings?

It is indeed a Sin to offend conscience, though erroneous, but it is also a sinne to act according to that erroneous conscience: So that he who suffers sinne upon his brother, is guilty, as well as he that tempts or forces him to sinne; but he that offers to teach him, and forces him to no more, but to hearken, and consider, or to forbear infecting others, is so farre from tempting him to sinne, that he betraues his and others soules, together with Gods truth, if he doe it not.

Wee (and not the Bishops onely) forsooke Romes authority, not simply because Rome taught other errors, but even because its Authority was an Error; and so was the Bishops Authority too, though some of the men were, and are yet very Orthodoxe in other points: but now no such Authority is assumed by any as they usurped.

It

and that unparti-
all, free, unmuze-
led triall of truth,
which we thought
unjustly denied to
us from the
Bishops, wee now
as unjustly and
Bishop like deny to
others.

Truth among those that
can understand and appre-
hend it, hath a subduing
power beyond the whip,
and in those that under-
stand not, the whip may
perhaps breede a submis-
sion, but not possibly, that
consent, knowledge, and
faith, without which acti-
ons most conformable to
truth, are yet in us but
sune.

I read in the Scriptures many ex-
cellent Rules of bearing, not offen-
ding, not judging, not putting a
stumbling block in the way of those
for whom (though perhaps weake and
erroneous) Christ dyed, &c. I read
2 Tim. 2. 24, 25. That we should be
gentle, apt to teach, patient, in meeke-
nesse instructing even them that
oppose themselves.

It was not the Authority of the Bishops (as
Bishops) but the tyranny of some (of most) of
them, that denyed us an unpartiall, free, un-
muzled tryall of truth (as your phrase is) but this,
quatenus Tyrannicall, must only referre to those
truthes which Protestants differ in, not to those
which are vitalls of Christianity. For if by an un-
partiall, free, unmuzled tryall of truth, we meane
a liberty publicke to dispute whether Christ be
God? or the Soule immortall? we never complain-
ed that this liberty was denyed, which cannot
be granted, without enduring blasphemy, and
hazarding many soules.

It is certaine that truth apprehended
subdues most strongly, but it is also cer-
taine, that, vexatio dat intellectum, The
rodde and reproofe give Wisdom, Prov.
29. 15. And it is undeniable both in rea-
son and experience, that by forcing a man
to study, he may be subdued to and by
truth, that would have scorned eternally,
if your whippes had not taught him
better manners.

Yet I say still, No man should be for-
ced to act without faith, but onely to give
just proofe, that he is willing to receive
truth, and to labour for it, and withall
to forbear mischeiving others.

The Rules towards a
Weake Conscience are delive-
red in matters of indifferency,
and Christian Liberty by
them not seene, not in mat-
ters of greatest moment in
Religion, yet meekenesse is to
be used (by Teachers) even
to such as oppose them-
selves, but by Governours,
so much severity withall, as
their frowardnesse, and o-
thers danger call for. God

Nay

Nay further, I find generalls in the word of God, that the followers of truth must suffer persecution;

but for their persecuti-
on of o-
thers, or
whipping
men into
the truth,
I finde nei-
ther pre-
cept in
Scripture,
nor exam-
ple any
where else
but at Rome

God indeed saith *All that will live godly in Christ Iesus shall suffer persecution.* But men that call for liberty of conscience, doe in effect say that neither godly nor ungodly may be made to suffer any thing, if they doe but pretend conscience.

As for persecuting (or *whipping*) men into the truth, There be examples and precepts too, more then one in the old Testament. (and it were iniustice to looke for them in the New Testament, which mentions no godly or christian Magistrates acts: nor any one name but the converted *Sergius Paulus*, *Act. 13.* nor any duty of Magistrates, but that, *Rom 13.* of not bearing the Sword in vaine &c:) The precept against the false Prophet, *Deut. 13.* And the whole City seduced to Idolatry; and against Blasphemy, *Lev. 24.* and giving their Seed to *Moloch*, *Lev. 20. 2.* And the example of *Elijah* slaying the Prophets of *Baall*, *1 Kings 18.* who yet acted according to their consciences apparently: and *Asa's* covenant that whoever would not seeke God should be put to death; and *Isaiah's* compelling them to serve God: and yet no doubt many consciences still cleaved to their Idolls, and so the story and the Prophets assure us. *Rome* then did not introduce this; but abuses it against the truth which was ordayned for it.

I pray pardon this digressi-
on, in which I am if erro-
neous, yet impartiall in
what concernes me, not be-
ing neither Brownist nor
Anabaptist, but wishing
those a being among us, who
doyn with us in one Christi-
an and one Common liberty.

As you are impartiall, so am I so mo-
derate, as to wish an Anabaptist or
Brownist lesse punishment then they
wish mee, and doe sincerely wish them, so
long a being among us (I means their
persons) as is necessary to convince
them of their errours, provided that
they will shew they sincerely seeke
truth, and forbear seducing others,
but not otherwise.

FINIS.

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